Sunlight At Last

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Sunlight At Last

by air_of_the_Waterfall

Summary

As winter approaches its end, Will takes care of Little Hannibal when he catches a cold. Later, they go for a spring picnic.

Notes

Thank you to everyone who left a comment on Wolves! I just wasn't sure how to reply at the time, but I really appreciate you. If you have ideas of what you want to see in this series, I'd love to hear them, but please keep it rated T.

Based on "Two" and "Sun" by Sleeping At Last :)

Will woke to find his body limp and weak, his middle heavy, and his limbs light and tingling. An experimental sniff made him groan with his nose plugged and a headache nudging forward. His throat felt like a fifty-year-old motel carpet, and his eyes were puffed up and much too warm

A gentle voice and caress immediately brightened his mood. “Good morning, darling. How are you feeling?”

In response, Will groaned again and pressed his face into a sweaty pillow. The thought of Hannibal seeing him like this was… abhorrent for some reason; ironic since they’d seen each other in much worse states. Hannibal lay behind him, propped on one elbow and studying him fondly.

“Pretty terrible, Doctor Lecter,” Will grumbled, voice stuffy. “Whadda’ you smell? Bubonic plague? Encephalitis?”

Hannibal chuckled and smoothed a hand through Will’s matted hair. “It is merely a bad cold.”

Will yawned and tried to get comfortable again. “Well, that’s… good at least.”

“Yes, it most certainly is. Try to fall back asleep, my dear. I’d like you to take these in the meantime.”

He offered up two pills and a glass of water, which Will downed without question. Pills were second nature and the cool water soothed him. He drifted into another deep sleep and woke around noon, when Hannibal fed him a small portion of oatmeal that was probably delicious if only Will could taste it. Regardless, its warmth and soft, lumpy texture felt like a massage in his aching throat. He finished it gratefully and leaned on Hannibal’s chest. His husband rubbed his sore shoulders and lavished him with quiet murmurs of affection that outshone further doses of medicine.

Overall, it wasn’t a terrible way to spend a few days.

On the fourth day, Will woke up feeling clear-headed if sluggish and tired. Hannibal was absent from their bed, but quiet noise and delectable scents drifted in from the kitchen. After brushing his teeth and throwing on a robe, Will managed to feel more human than he had all week, so he ventured downstairs with bare feet on pleasantly cool floors.

The dogs swarmed him with happy woofs, and once he waded his way through them he latched onto Hannibal, face pressed between his shoulder blades and arms around his middle. Will took a deep breath, scented vanilla, French toast, breakfast sausage, and soap, and exhaled contentedly. Hannibal laid a hand over his.

“Good morning. You look better.”

“Mm, yeah,” Will sighed. “Thanks for all the help.”

Hannibal turned from the stove enough to kiss his hair. He murmured, “It’s the very least I could do for you, Will. Besides, I swore an oath.”

His tone was playful, but Will sensed a bit of unease beneath. He touched Hannibal’s jaw and turned his face to meet his eyes.

“Hannibal.”

“Yes?”

“You like taking care of me, don’t you?”

“Of course. It’s an honour.”

Will gently stroked his cheekbone with a thumb, then cupped his face completely. Hannibal didn’t protest on behalf of the half-finished food.

“Hannibal, I *love* taking care of *you* . You never have to make it up to me or compensate for anything. You know that, right?”

Hannibal’s eyes glimmered with affection and relief. Just as softly, he replied, “Sometimes I take for granted how you can see right through me. Yes, I understand. Thank you, Will.”

Will took a step back to give them both space, leaning a hip on the counter instead. “Good. Just wanted to check in.”

Hannibal absently flipped a piece of French toast, then watched the uncooked side sizzle with a pleased hum. “I’m alright, Will, but I can see through *you* just the same. What are you thinking about?”

Age regression had helped Hannibal through an unpleasant winter of memories and grief, but now they were approaching March. While the weather appeared to be improving, Canadian winters were more like relays than marathons. When one round of snow began to melt into slush, another storm caked on more layers like a finicky artist.

Will took a breath and studied the tile floor. “I just… uh… It’s almost spring. I know I should be happy that you won’t have so much stress, and I am, but… I’ll really miss your little self.”

Hannibal paused, turning to give Will his full attention and a kind smile.

“Who said we have to stop? I truly enjoy littlespace now that I can share it with someone who understands. I was afraid you’d be eager for it to end, but if you’re not then we can continue as we’ve been.”

Will brightened instantly and beamed right back. “Really?” Then, his face fell a bit. “I don’t want to pressure you.”

“You’re not,” Hannibal assured. “I’d love to stay in touch with this carefree part of myself. As I’m sure you understand, being brilliant is rather work-intensive.”

Will snorted to hide a chuckle. “I hate that you deserve your arrogance.”

Hannibal smirked and turned back to finish breakfast. After kissing his cheek goodbye, Will took the dogs out into a gorgeous blue and white morning, a slight spring in his step and laughter in his chest. The sprawling emptiness around their property breathed easily, snow glittering in the sun and blowing like small fountains into the air.

He would never quite get used to being in love. Every day felt new.

. . .

Unfortunately, colds are generally contagious. The next morning, Hannibal woke up sniffling and bedraggled, and a sympathetic Will brought him pills and tea.

“Sorry, hon,” Will chuckled.

Hannibal sighed and adjusted the damp cloth on his forehead, staring at the ceiling and looking morose. “I have not fallen ill in twenty years,” he sulked. “I do not get sick.”

“Evidently, you do.” Will smoothed back Hannibal’s hair. “Don’t worry, I’m here to look after you.”

Hannibal’s eyes went wide, and his demeanour shifted from sullen to sweet and hopeful. His voice changed as well to that of his little self. “Promise?”

Will nodded. “Of course.”

“I don’t want to sleep.” Hannibal sat up and the cloth fell off his face. “I want to watch *Inside Out* with Caesar and you and the dogs.”

With a fond sigh, Will scooped up the cloth before it could soak the blanket. Hannibal would not be falling asleep any time soon, but the closest thing to rest he could get was ideal.

“Okay,” Will conceded. “Let’s go downstairs. Do you want to change into different jammies first?”

Grinning from ear to ear, Hannibal nodded and hurried out of bed to the walk-in closet. A few minutes later, he emerged in a soft blue onesie with slippers and skipped across the room again.

“Come on, Will! We have to get Caesar!”

Will laughed and followed him through the hall, then opened the attic door and helped him climb the ladder. Hannibal tackled his giant stuffed dinosaur and hugged it around the neck. The thing was twice his size and a pain to move around the house, but Will managed it gladly to the tune of Hannibal’s excited chattering. However, Hannibal’s skin still held a pallor and his voice came out muffled. Peppy as he was, he was still sick.

Once they were situated in the living room, he snuggled against Will’s side on the couch, Caesar and their dogs dutifully joining them on the floor.

“This is going to be a relaxing day, okay?” Will prompted. “Do you want anything to eat or drink?”

Hannibal shook his head. “No, thank you. Can I have my soother, please?”

Will reached for the pacifier he now kept in a side table drawer, then uncapped it and held it to Hannibal’s lips. He took it greedily with a sigh and suckled as the film started. Will watched Hannibal more than the screen, storing each response in his growing mind palace. Hannibal giggled when Joy and Sadness awkwardly tussled for the control panel, and Will considered how many more oceans he’d brave for this fallen angel.

It was a high number.

“Disgust is my favourite,” Hannibal announced. “She’s smart. Broccoli can’t just go by itself! Cook showed me how to make broccoli taste good. You put cheese and spices on it, and you have it with meat and other veggies. It’s very important. It’s also good in cast rolls.”

Will grinned. “You mean *casserole* ?”

Hannibal nodded matter-of-factly. “Yes. Cast rolls.”

“Okay, sweetheart.”

The movie went on and Will settled in contentedly, giving Hannibal tissues for his nose whenever it ran. Eventually, as Joy and Bing-Bong were trying to escape the memory void, Will had to pause it and pat Hannibal on the back while he had a coughing fit. When his breathing returned to normal, Hannibal flopped back on the couch with a scowl.

“How do I get better?” he complained.

Will gently smoothed his hair. “Well, your immune system has to fight the virus that’s making you sick.” He beckoned Hannibal to lean on him again, then gently turned over his wrist to trace blue-looking veins. Hannibal’s eyes followed his path with fascination as Will went on. “You have white blood cells like tiny soldiers, and they kick out the germs to protect you. Sometimes they need a little help, though, so we take medicine and rest.”

Hannibal looked up at him. “Doctors fight germs too! Uncle Robertas said I would be a good doctor.”

Will smiled, choking down a snicker at the irony. “You could do whatever you wanted, Han.”

“I’m going to be a doctor.” Hannibal declared. “That way I can cut people up and see what they do. Mr. Jakov showed me a book about skeletons, and I found one from a fox in the forest. I found a baby bird too, and Mischa helped me take care of it. I’d be a good doctor.”

“Do you like playing in the woods?” Will asked.

Hannibal nodded seriously. “It’s my favourite.”

It dawned on Will that he hadn't taken Little Hannibal outside the house yet. Snow and cold upset him, but the improving weather opened a plethora of opportunities. Of course, anywhere public wasn't an option when people could recognize them… but the large groves of trees around their property were ample shelter from prying eyes.

Will's smile grew impossibly wider.

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A few weeks later, newborn spring burst over the land like spilled paint. Hannibal and Will went for frequent walks with the dogs, who got covered in mud before jumping up on their humans' light sweaters. Will would laugh at the sunlit image of his husband knelt in the grass to indulgently pet them all, and cool breezes ruffled Hannibal's hair and the dogs' fur. Rosamund and Dante were hardly puppies anymore, ears having perked up into triangles, and their fur had developed beautiful colour gradients from black to sandy gold. They ran faster than Winston Jr. and Georgia, all bounding over a hill while Cephy struggled to keep up on her tiny legs.

Will took a moment one day to stop and breathe, tipping his head to the cloudless, dewy sky. He savoured bird chatters paired with the musky scent of yellow dandelion. Hannibal sidled up to him with an affectionate hug from behind, his arms playfully pinning Will's to his sides, and Will laughed with his head resting back on his shoulder. The frame of Hannibal's sunglasses pressed into Will's temple.

"Are you tired?"

Will grinned and sighed. "No, Hannibal, I'm *happy* . I'm genuinely happy most of the time now, and I never thought I would be."

"That's all I ever wanted for you," Hannibal said, and they both let the flood of recognition and nostalgia hit them.

Will squeezed his hand. "For both of us."

After a few minutes, he added, "I was thinking… I had an idea last time you regressed. Would you be comfortable playing outside as your little self? You've never asked to, and I thought it would be fun."

Hannibal considered it. "I think I would like that very much."

"Great. Just tell me when."

The next morning, Will woke to a bright-eyed Hannibal peering down at him and hopping all over the bed.

"Will!" he laughed, "Wake up, wake up! Let's go outside! I made a picnic!"

Will blinked the sleep from his eyes and sat up. He was incapable of saying no to that enthusiasm. "Alright, you lead the way."

They both dressed in jeans, T-shirts, and hiking boots, and Will helped Hannibal tie his shoelaces. Then, he slung a cooler bag over his shoulder that Hannibal had proudly packed.

“It’s got ham and cheese and potato and broccoli cast rolls, apple sauce, carrots, and lemonade. There’s brownies and cookies for dessert,” he announced, as serious as his adult self when it came to food.

Will smiled. “Sounds perfect, Han. Where do you want to go?”

Hannibal ran out into the front yard that merged with miles of rolling fields, freshly green and stretching up to greet the sun after a winter sleep. Laughing, Hannibal tore across the grass, heedless of the mud and calling out with glee. He was remarkably fast but less coordinated than usual, as if having forgotten he could run at all.

“Will, hurry up! Come on! We’re almost there!”

Will followed him into the dappled shade of the woods, where Hannibal kicked pebbles and skipped while reminiscing about a Mr. Jakov. Hannibal mentioned this man a lot in littlespace, but never as an adult and rarely in any detail; it was possible he repressed some memories as an adult and did not wish to speak of grief. Hence, Will was hesitant to ask too many questions, but he wished he could meet Mr. Jakov and thank him. His obvious support of and impact on Hannibal could not be understated, and Will craved every scrap of information that made Hannibal Lecter who he was.

Hannibal interrupted himself with a gasp. “Ooh! Will, can I climb that tree? Can I? Can I? Can I?”

Will bit the inside of his cheek and studied a large, statuesque tree with welcoming branches and pale green buds.

“Okay, just hold on tight.”

Hannibal zipped away like a racehorse out of the gate, scrambling up the tree with speed and poise that made Will grin and shake his head. He briefly imagined Hannibal as a jungle cat chasing some poor bird, then snickered while squinting against the light.

“Come on, Will! I found a good branch for the picnic!”

As promised, he sat high in the air on a sturdy branch that curved to form a cradle, his feet swinging merrily and sending some twigs tumbling to earth with a rustle. His small voice was far away, getting lost in the breeze, and it was this that made Will hoist the cooler bag strap over the opposite shoulder to reach him. Hannibal was Will’s, and if the ocean couldn’t steal him, then the sky sure as hell wouldn’t either.

Will had scaled plenty of trees in his own childhood, and he grinned as it all came back to him: the bark scraping his hands and lodging dirt under his nails, the instinct to duck and swerve when a branch reached for his eyes, and the sensation of hanging suspended in neither one world nor another. It made him buzz with reckless joy, even if his middle-aged body would complain about the exertion tomorrow.

When he made it to the branch where Hannibal clapped his hands and squealed in excitement, Will laughed and gave him a high-five. They were at least forty feet off the ground, eye-level with the grove's canopy and tucked in amongst a wealth of new life.

"Yay, Will! Yay, Will!"

Will grinned and began to unpack the food. Balancing it and himself was an impressive feat. "Hungry?"

Hannibal nodded, leaning his elbows forward onto another convenient branch.

"I like it up here," he mused. "It's perfect."

Will handed him a heat-sealed container of casserole and a fork, and Hannibal took a polite little bite while swinging his feet and staring across the field. They ate in silence for a few minutes, and Will decided that he could get used to these meals shared while surveying the quiet world.

Over the next few weeks, he built Hannibal a treehouse.

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